Shoppers key to growth
Increasing business investment gives demand a nudge – Business, 1D

Laugh till you cry
Three Billboards explores joy of outrage, infuses an awkward humor. – Style, 1E

Arkansas Democrat Gazette
ARKANSAS' NEWSPAPER
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Printed at Little Rock • December 1, 2017 ArkansasOnline.com 70 Pages • 9 Sections $1.00

In the news

■ **Wayne Gallant**, sheriff of Oxford County, Maine, admits he sent a lewd photo from his office but is refusing to resign, saying he "absolutely" denies allegations that he solicited two employees for sex and threatened to fire one who rebuffed him, his attorney said.

■ **Ronald Strickland**, 69, a retired Tennessee Highway Patrol sergeant who pleaded guilty to smuggling a 22-year-old woman from Honduras to his home in Franklin in 2016, was sentenced to 30 months in prison, federal prosecutors said.

■ **Daniel Seuzeneau**, a police spokesman in Slidell, La., said a 14-year-old boy who crashed as he led police in a car chase, told officers he took a luxury SUV owned by a friend's father on a "test drive" because he was considering buying it.

■ **Sean Ramsey**, 48, arrested in Atlanta in mid-September for illegal soliciting by holding a sign reading "homeless please help," was released from jail after being held for two months because he couldn't afford to pay $200 bail, his attorney said.

■ **Bjorn Samstrom**, 41, was convicted of rape under Swedish laws and sentenced to 10 years in prison for coercing young teenagers in Canada, Britain and the United States to perform sexual acts in front of webcams by threatening them or their families, prosecutors said.

■ **Steven Spolidoro**, 41, of Woburn, Mass., was arrested in the theft of $1,000 from a bank after he crashed his vehicle as he was being chased by police and was caught when he fled on foot and tried to hide in a portable toilet in downtown Boston.

■ **Donte Henley** and Josiah Zachery, who assured their supervisor at a Boston nonprofit that steers young people away from crime that they could work peacefully with a rival gang member, were convicted of shooting the man in the head as the three shoveled snow in 2015, prosecutors said.

■ **Adam Gloe**, a police sergeant in Placentia, Calif., said workers at a Goodwill thrift store found an inert hand grenade in a box dropped off by an unidentified woman, prompting the evacuation of neighboring businesses until a bomb squad removed the device.

■ **William Greer**, 51, a Texas fugitive on the U.S. Marshal's 15 Most Wanted list because of the death of his girlfriend in 2006, was captured in Mexico when authorities, acting on a tip, confirmed that he had a missing toe, matching a description released when he disappeared 11 years ago.

WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK
Today Mostly sunny and mild.
High 62, light east winds.
Tonight Clouds increasing, cooler.
Low 42.

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Quiet in Burma, pope speaks out in Bangladesh

AP/L'Osservatore Romano

Pope Francis greets the crowd Thursday as he arrives for a Mass in Rangoon, Burma. Later, he flew to neighboring Bangladesh, where he broke his silence about Burma's treatment of Rohingya Muslims and demanded that the international community act to resolve Asia's worst refugee crisis in decades. *Article, 8A*

GOP looking at scale-back of some cuts

Move meant to win support of tax plan, despite deficit

COMPILED BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans weighed scaling back the tax cuts in their major package to secure crucial support as congressional analysts said Thursday that the legislation would add $1 trillion to the deficit over the next decade.

Republicans were making major changes to the bill — a top political priority of President Donald Trump — up to the last minute, including one that would roll back some of the tax cuts after six years to appease deficit hawks.

The scramble to alter the bill came after senators said the chamber's parliamentarian had ruled that automatic "triggers" designed to guard against big deficits would violate Senate rules. GOP leaders' main concern was winning over lawmakers, including Sens. Bob Corker of Tennessee and Jeff Flake of Arizona, concerned about adding more red ink to the deficit.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., had expressed confidence early in the day, but he has little margin for error with a 52-48 majority. He can afford to lose two votes while counting on Vice President Mike Pence to break the tie.

"We're certainly optimistic. As you know we had everybody on board to take the bill up. I think everyone is trying to get to yes. We'll have an open amendment process but I'm optimistic," McConnell said.

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AP/J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Thursday that he was "certainly optimistic" about getting the GOP tax measure through the Senate.

Tillerson seen as on way out; Pompeo in wings

COMPILED BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — The White House has developed a plan to force out Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, whose relationship with President Donald Trump has been strained, and replace him with Mike Pompeo, the CIA director, within the next several weeks, senior administration officials said Thursday.

Pompeo would be replaced at the CIA by Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., who has been a key ally of the president on national security matters, according to the White House plan. Cotton has signaled that he would accept the job if offered, said the officials, who insisted on anonymity to discuss sensitive deliberations before decisions are announced.

It was not immediately clear whether Trump had given final approval to the plan developed by John Kelly, the White House chief of staff, but the president has been said to have soured on Tillerson and in general is ready to make a change at the State Department. Tillerson was at the White House on Thursday twice for meetings, but neither the president nor

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Tillerson

Pompeo

Cotton

Seat in Senate in play if Cotton goes to CIA

FRANK E. LOCKWOOD
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is weighing whether to make U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton the next director of the Central Intelligence Agency, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* reported Thursday.

Both stories relied on statements from unnamed administration officials.

In Arkansas, potential candidates are already looking at Cotton's Senate seat, just in case he steps aside.

In Washington, the tentative plan calls for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to be ousted and replaced by CIA Director Mike Pompeo, with Cotton filling Pompeo's vacancy, the newspapers reported.

Asked via text about the reports, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders replied Thursday afternoon: "We have no personnel announcements."

In an interview, Cotton spokesman Caroline Rabbitt Tabler didn't address the substance of the reports.

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Trump urged halt to Russia inquiry, GOP senators say

COMPILED BY DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE STAFF FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump over the summer repeatedly urged senior Senate Republicans, including the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to end the panel's investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election, according to a half-dozen lawmakers and aides.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., the intelligence committee chairman, said in an interview this week that Trump told him he was eager to see an investigation that has overshadowed much of the first year of his presidency come to an end.

"It was something along the lines of, 'I hope you can conclude this as quickly as possible,'" Burr said. He said he replied to Trump that "when we have exhausted everybody we need to talk to, we will finish."

In addition, according to lawmakers and aides, Trump told Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., a member of the intelligence committee, to end the investigation swiftly.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., a former chairman of the intelligence committee, said in an interview this week that Trump's requests were "inappropriate" and

See **RUSSIA**, Page 8A

Judge says no delay, corruption trial starts Monday

Proceedings for ex-senator, 2 others to last 3 weeks, include 62 witnesses

DOUG THOMPSON
NWA DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

FAYETTEVILLE — The public corruption trial of former state Sen. Jon Woods is to start Monday after U.S. District Judge Timothy Brooks denied a request Thursday to delay it.

Woods, and co-defendants Oren Paris III and Randell Shelton Jr., will stand trial in a reported kickback scheme.

Brooks issued his ruling Thursday during a six-hour pretrial hearing.

Forty-one prosecution witnesses, including former state Rep. Micah Neal, and as many as 21 defense witnesses are expected to testify at the trial, which is expected to last three weeks and possibly a month, attorneys advised the judge.

Also during Thursday's hearing, Milton R. "Rusty" Cranford was identified for the first time in open court proceedings as the anonymous businessman who is reported to have paid kickbacks to Neal and Woods in return for state General Improvement Fund grants. Cranford reportedly applied for the grants for AmeriWorks, a Bentonville-based nonprofit group, through the use of Alternative Opportunities Inc., a nonprofit health care and counseling company.

Ecclesia College, a private Christian school in Springda-

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NWA Democrat-Gazette/ANDY SHUPE

Former state Sen. Jon Woods (right) and members of his legal team walk toward the Paul Hammerschmidt Federal Building in Fayetteville for his hearing Thursday.